

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT: “Subject to all passions”: Representing Women’s Emotions in Early Modern English Drama

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This dissertation examines contradictions in discourses regarding women and expected forms of female emotional expression in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1599) and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1606), Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), and George Chapman’s *The Widow’s Tears* (1605). I draw on emotions history as a part of a cultural study of early modern drama; this new approach benefits literary criticism by creating a dialog between historical understandings of women's emotional expressions and current critical conversations about early modern gender constructs and hierarchies. This project considers four key questions: 1) How do essentialized views of emotional expression help to define and regulate what it means to be a man or woman within a society that is struggling with single-sex and two-sex models? 2) What stereotypes about women emerge from gendered views of emotional expression? 3) How does drama reinforce or redefine “feeling rules” for women? 4) What are the consequences for characters who conform to or defy gender expectations, and how does an awareness of emotional expectations allow them to navigate gender relationships and/or disrupt gender hierarchies? In answering these questions, I offer three contributions. At the most basic level, I document complex

understandings of early modern emotional expressions and their relationship with the material body. I bring together conversations about “leaky” female bodies and anxieties about feigning femininity to highlight the problems with dominant feeling rules that attempt to contain women. Finally, I demonstrate a crucial need for individuals to navigate cultural expectations of emotional expression within their respective emotional communities. These plays, with their disruption of gender hierarchies and their relationship to real women’s experiences, reveal that emotional expression is a site of struggle; characters that fail to navigate gendered expectations of emotion are punished, while characters that acknowledge the demands of emotional communities often find ways to work within the system. Such work creates a more encompassing understanding of how emotions were represented on the stage, in print, and in everyday life.